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EDITORIALS

Inside The People s Temple 'Expose'

New West magazine, which is the most recent acquisition of the Australian newspaper tycoon, Rupert Murdock, who has added the New York Post and the New York Village Voice to his first U.S. publication, the National Star, publishes in its issue of Aug. 1 "Inside Peoples Temple," by Marshall Kilduff and Phil Tracy. This is the long-awaited expose of Rev. Jim Jones, "one of the state's most politically potent leaders...." Marshall Kilduff is a San Francisco Chronicle reporter, and Phil Tracy a New West contributing editor.

A review of this article reveals that Kilduff and Tracy have built their great expose on the basis of interviews with several former members of Peoples Temple who, over the past several years, have coalesced into the small yet articulate Former Members of the Peoples Temple congregation. This small band of former members seems to have been either disenchanted when their personal ambitions conflicted with the stated church programs, or individuals whose aggressive, illegal programs were rejected by the church membership and the church's leaders. Many of these disgruntled excommunicates have previously whispered their venom against Peoples Temple to all individual ears in the Western Addition that would pause long enough to listen. Several have even approached this newspaper with their stories and wild-eyed statements of misdeeds attributed to Jim Jones and his congregation. We have counseled these malcontents to seek redress of their alleged grievances against Peoples Temple and its leaders in a court of law. Moreover, whenever our investigators presented these statements to Jones and other leaders of the congregation, they have always made available for inventory church records dealing with these alleged misdeeds. Under probing, these allegations have been unsubstantiated by fact.

In the article by Kilduff and Tracy these malcontents, psychoneurotics, and, in some instances, provocateurs--probably establishment agents--have found willing ears and consummate skill to organize fragmented gossip into a cloak-and-dagger mosaic that portrays Jim Jones and Peoples Temple as a malevolent instrument destroying human personalities, robbing the poor, and engaged in a conspiracy against the established social and political order.

Word comes to us that the writers of this New West article did a two-hour taped interview with the Rev. Jim Jones, and nowhere in this lengthy tome did they use a word of it. Can it be that this article was written, "not to praise Caesar, but to bury Caesar"?

It is significant that Kilduff was unable to peddle his venom in the pages of his employer, the San Francisco Chronicle. If the rumors, half-truths, and mental variations of these former Peoples Temple members represent the best investigative reporting job that Kilduff and Tracy can do, then heaven help the fine art of investigative reporting! Moreover, if this "yellow" journalism is to be the forte of Rupert Murdock in building his newly acquired U.S. journalism empire, this type of journalism-for-hire should clearly reveal to the U.S. public here in the West the plague that has descended upon us with Murdock's recent ascent into the journalistic firmament.

Jim Jones and the Peoples Temples represent some of the most invigorating and challenging religious organizations to appear in California in recent years. Jones apparently is committed to the basic philosophy proclaimed to Christendom in Jesus of Nazareth's Sermon on the Mount. In attempting to use the moral force of Christianity in dealing with man-made problems that bedevil, haunt, and dehumanize the social order, Jones has created a cyclone where formerly the political leaders, economic scoundrels, and even impotent religious leaders have failed the very foundations of their ethics, and their leadership mantles have been rent, torn asunder, leaving those pompous pseudo-leaders naked and unclothed to be viewed as the hypocrites that they have been for decades.

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We have no intention of attempting to defend Rev. Jim Jones, the officers, and the members of the Peoples Temples. They are admirably equipped with keen legal minds, incisive economic advisers, dedicated and committed followers, to defend themselves.

However, we have been amazed at the tendency of political, social, and religious hangers-on to flee the Peoples Temple and Jones's establishment, once the venom of the New West article became the subject of treatment by all mass communications media—radio, television, and printed. In the 50-odd years of publication of the news embodied in the Reporter Publications, and the more than 30 years of active participation in the printing of a Black community newspaper by the present publisher, there has been no religious institution, to our knowledge, more dedicated to the use of the high moral, courageous commitments embodied in Christianity, which is a revolutionary religion, to carry out what has become the motto of the Reporter Publications: "Dedicated to the cause of the people—that no good cause shall lack a champion, and that evil shall not thrive unopposed."

We have from time to time investigated the complaints that persons have lodged against Peoples Temples. On the basis of repeated in-depth investigations, we say, as one with strong commitments to the role of religion in the lives of men: We have found no fault with Jim Jones's religious philosophy or the activities of the Peoples Temples. We believe in the rule of law! We support the nation's judicial cornerstone, that ours is a nation of laws and not of men! We believe that thieves, rogues, and liars who destroy and assail worthy individuals' or institutions' reputations should be brought before the bar of justice! If there are those who feel aggrieved, as indicated by their alleged statements of the interviewees in the New West article, we urge these persons to charge the institution and the man with crimes, and let them face the accused in a court of law!

We also remind the honored Fourth Estate, which probably includes radio and television as well as the press, that accused in the U.S.A. are assumed innocent until their guilt is proved in a court of law. We hasten to remind the mass communications media that a free press is one of the cornerstones of a democratic society, yet freedom of the press demands of all who operate under this mantle that a prerequisite safeguarding freedom is the corollary demand—that the press must be responsible.

The reputation of a man and of an institution is a most valued possession in a society of free people. It has been said by many, especially Adlai Stevenson, "The people are wise—wiser than the politicians think." This might be amended: "The people are wise—wiser than the press thinks."

An institution that feeds the poor, houses the homeless, rescues young and old from the wretchedness and despair of drug addiction, marshals the political potential of a people, and husbands the economic pittance of the poor masses into a powerful instrument for justice, freedom, and equality, while building a just and humane society, by its very nature will have many enemies hidden, lurking in the shadows of greed, ignorance, neurosis, and hallucinations. If such an institution becomes powerful, then it must expect its enemies to become powerful. While the New West article was intended to defame and to dismember and deter an increasing band of dedicated followers of Christian ethics, the great possibilities are there that the story will boomerang, and that which they seek to destroy out of this momentary irritation will become a potent antidote to the hopelessness and the despair that permeate the masses. Such an airing of relative choices posing the question of right and wrong, hope and despair, exploitation of the many by the few, and the very questioning nature of the political process itself, may become a rallying banner for those who heretofore have seen no institution or no man worthy of their support and admiration; these newly enlightened individuals might recognize: All of the problems disturbing a distraught humanity basically are man-made problems. Surely many good men and women of courage, steadfastness, and fundamental belief in the power of the organized masses will see in Jim Jones and Peoples Temple not a comet that momentarily lights up the darkness, but another reminder of the meanings of Edmund Burke's prophetic words, uttered before the birth of the nation 200 years ago: "All that is necessary for evil in the world to triumph is for enough good men to do nothing."

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Publisher